

Mansfield and Chekhov – One Might Be Anywhere

This, so near the end. This return of the straight-fringed *dame seule* to the land that signifies her battle with ill health. An exile's planting of her creed of home, in foreign soil. For she is not in her home-from-home land – but as close as she can get to somewhere that, at least, feels Russian. And she is someone who always prepares for a journey 'as though for death'. So 'all is in order'.

Of course she knows. She's read his final letters, looked in vain for blood and rage. Of course she doesn't want to know. It won't be enough for her reader self to leave behind the young disciple and the resurrected master. She will crave another *rendezvous*, to tell him that her writing is on hold. She will fear the answer. That dream of a distant, unreadable sea.

Still, this is where she needs to be. Not in one of those wartime hideaways on the Côte d'Azur. Instead, in this almost-castle near Fontainebleau – *prieuré* solid, fairytale brittle. A cow shed with a gallery, a breathing in of 'colder and colder' hope. Yet, now she is no longer certain he will take her hand. For 'illness has swallowed him' and she must let him go.

Katherine Mansfield died in France, in the Gurdjieff Institute, on January 9th, 1923, aged 34. Anton Chekhov died in Badenweiler, Germany, on July 15th, 1904, aged 44. The quotes in the text are from KM's Journal/Letters from 1922. The quote in the title is from her final letter, dated 31st December 1922.